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A questionnaire for students discontinuing their foreign language study is presented along with suggestions for its administration and use as a diagnostic tool for administrators. The brief form covers such factors as--(1) reasons for dropping the language, (2) availability of advanced courses, (3) notions of fluency, (4) student objectives, (5) school transfer, (6) feelings about native speakers of the language, (7) influence of grades, and (8) the influence of others in making the decision. (AF)

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DIAGNOSING THE DECREASE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENROLLMENT

by

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Educators in a school district may believe that the district's foreign language program is not a strong or vigorous one. They may feel that too few enroll or that those who drop out do so before they attain fluency. Why don't more educators try to find out why students drop out? Finding the answer is not easy because of the many variables. Gathering data year after year is a time-consuming process. Merely asking a student his opinion may not give you the truth; but a sufficient number of opinions may indicate a trouble spot. If a student says that he did not need further study, you may not know if he felt that he did not or if his counselor told him that he did not.

A principal, superintendent, or supervisor of foreign language who wishes to diagnose the problems objectively may want to use the instrument proposed in this article. A questionnaire with a series of possible reasons for the student's drop will definitely isolate the gross problems that exist, and for no other reason such a questionnaire has value. Faulty interpretation of the inaccurate student comments could be injurious to the innocent teacher or to the teacher who expected the student to study, behave himself in class, and put forth effort. The accuracy of an accusation by the student, then, should be checked by further study and conference.

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Some students will be honest when they admit that the personality of the teacher, his meanness, his sarcasm, his poor command of the language, or his lack of enthusiasm caused the drop. But others might not want to write their reason. They may be too kind or timid to fill in that part of the form. An oral interview to discuss the completed questionnaire would improve the validity of the answers even though discussion with each dropout takes times.

The questionnaire is designed for the registrar or foreign language supervisor to use at the time when students register for their next

year's courses.[1] A foreign language department head may also care to use the form with perhaps slight variations. A critical appraisal of the district's foreign language program should be made in the elementary schools as well as in the junior and senior high schools. Isolation and identification of problems is perhaps even more vital at the elementary than at the secondary school level, for if pupils become disillusioned with foreign language in the elementary grades, they may never sign up for additional work later on.

The form is equally applicable for students who drop out of a foreign language class during the school year. Because of the personal nature of certain questions, it is my suggestion that the registrar or the district's foreign language supervisor be responsible for the administration and compilation of the form. Teachers should not be asked to distribute or collect it. Students might feel free to answer honestly when the teacher does not see the answers.

Not only should the department head or the district supervisor gather and maintain enrollment data in foreign language, but he should know why students from the elementary schools do not sign up for foreign language upon entering high school. He should know why each high school student does not continue with foreign language study. One way to build a strong program is to recognize the weak parts of it. Some problems may be insoluble. Those that are not can be attacked and solved.

The advice of a counselor is often quite important to a student who is planning next year's courses. Misinformation or a prejudice against foreign language in general by a counselor may dissuade a number of young people from electing a foreign language course or from continuing the study of a foreign language. Vigilance on the part of the foreign language supervisor or the administrator who is trying to build a strong program is imperative. Use of the questionnaire may disclose that a counselor really initiated the drop.

Answers on the questionnaires may disclose that certain teachers are advising students to drop. Other answers may identify an unfair or discriminatory grading practice. Lack of coordination of teachers' methods may exact a high toll in enrollment.[2]

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[1]Many of the articles in today's newspapers and magazines refer to the dropout as a young person leaving school. The term dropout in this paper refers to a person who drops or is pushed out of a foreign language class after a year or two.

[2]Pimsleur, Paul, Donald M. Sundland, and Ruth D. McIntyre, Under-Achievement in Foreign Language Learning, The Modern Language Association of America, New York, 1966.

REASONS FOR DISCONTINUING FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY

Date _____

Name of student _____ Name of foreign language _____

Circle Yes or No

1. Did you discontinue your study of foreign language because
   - -you wish to begin study of a different foreign language? Yes No
     If yes, name the new language _____
   - -of scheduling difficulties? Yes No
     Explain _____
   - -of teaching methods used? Yes No
     Explain _____
   - -you feel you are not well prepared for the advanced work? Yes No
     Explain _____

2. Was an advanced course available to you? Yes No

3. Have you attained the fluency in the foreign language that you intended? Yes No
   How did you reach this conclusion? (Check the answer or answers that apply)
   - By my score on a standardized test ____
   - The teacher said so ____
   - By the grade that I received ____
   - Other _____

4. What fluency in a foreign language should you have by the time you leave high school? _____

5. Did the grade you received have anything to do with your decision to drop the study of this foreign language Yes No
   Explain _____

6. Did the attitude of the teacher have anything to do with your decision to drop? Yes No
   Explain _____

7. Were you advised to drop? Yes No
   By whom? _____ Why _____

8. Do your parents know that you have dropped the foreign language course Yes No
   If yes, are they in agreement with you? _____

9. Did you transfer into this school? Yes No
   If yes, did this transfer have anything to do with your decision to discontinue foreign language study? Yes No
   Explain _____

10. Have your plans and life objectives changed since you began the study of this foreign language? Yes No
    Explain _____

11. Was your time well spent in the foreign language courses which you have already taken? Yes No

12. What do you feel about the people whose language you have studied? _____

13. What other reason do you have for discontinuing foreign language study? _____

_____

National enrollment figures show a year by year decrease in enrollment with less than 10% of those beginning language study in grade nine continuing into the fourth year.[3] Educators should do everything possible to keep students in language courses longer than they presently remain. Wholesale elimination of children from language classes during the first and second years especially must be curbed. In order to accomplish this the problem must be diagnosed carefully and then a cure suggested. The questionnaire should prove to be a practical and useful way of determining why so many young people discontinue their foreign language study. Positive steps can then be taken to strengthen those parts of the district foreign language program that the dropout students mention critically.

(See back of this page for questionnaire.)

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[3]Teague, Caroline and Hans Rutimann, Foreign-Language Offerings and Enrollments in Public Secondary Schools, Fall 1965, The Modern Language Association of America, New York, 1967.